

Assemblyman
PAUL KORETZ

Forty-second Assembly District

proudly representing the communities of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, Century City, Westwood, Bel Air, Brentwood, West Los Angeles, Hollywood, Hancock Park, Universal City, Studio City, and Sherman Oaks



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 13, 2004

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Legislature Calls on Health Agencies to Do More to Combat Hepatitis C

Silent Epidemic is 4 Times More Common Than HIV, Deaths Expected to Triple

Sacramento – ACR 244, authored by Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood), has passed the California Legislature with strong bipartisan support. The resolution is sponsored by the Hepatitis C Task Force of Los Angeles County and urges state and local health agencies to improve data collection, apply for federal funds, and to implement the 2001 *Hepatitis C Strategic Plan* through existing programs and educational materials whenever possible.

“More than half a million Californians are infected with Hepatitis C and most don’t even know they carry a potentially fatal disease. These people may unknowingly put others at risk of infection by seemingly harmless acts such as sharing a toothbrush or razor. There is a clear need for health agencies to do more to identify Hep C positive individuals, educate people at risk, and reduce the number of new infections,” said Mr. Koretz.

The most serious of all the Hepatitis viruses, the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is the most common chronic blood born viral infection in the U.S. and kills 8-10,000 Americans every year. It is often called the “silent epidemic” because 80 percent of people infected show no symptoms until 10 or 20 years later. Ultimately, HCV infection can lead to liver failure, liver cancer, or cirrhosis (irreversible and often fatal scarring of the liver). Only alcoholism causes more liver disease than Hepatitis C, and HCV is the leading reason for liver transplants in the United States. One third of people living with HIV suffer a co-infection with Hep C that accelerates the progression of both diseases.

Alberto Mendoza, Co-Chair of the Hepatitis C Task Force of LA County today underscored the need for more action by health agencies. “With one in 50 people infected with HCV, we urgently need better screening of people at risk such as veterans, emergency responders, and people who share needles or who received blood transfusions prior to July 1992. The general population needs to be educated about how Hep C is transmitted to avoid unnecessary exposures,” said Mendoza.

No vaccine exists for Hepatitis C. According to the *Hepatitis C Strategic Plan* published by the California Department of Health Services in 2001, deaths due to HCV related illness will triple in the next 10 to 20 years if effective interventions are not implemented. The primary mode of HCV transmission is contaminated blood, usually through shared needles or through other blood exposures. Unlike HIV, infectious Hepatitis C can live on surfaces for up to two weeks and is yet another reason why instruments that may be exposed to blood such as needles, surgical instruments, and manicurist tools must be properly sterilized after every use.

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